

Anaconda Mine

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency • Region 9



October 1999

Yerington, NV

WATER SAMPLING TO TAKE PLACE NEAR OLD COPPER MINE

The Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP), under oversight by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), will conduct water sampling in the Yerington area to determine if contamination from the old Anaconda Copper Mine has migrated to domestic and municipal wells off site. A community meeting to discuss the sampling will be held on October 20, 1999 (see box below).

Site History

The Anaconda Copper Company (purchased by ARCO in 1977) ran a mining and milling operation near Yerington, NV from 1953 to 1978. Following the closure of the mine, the land was bought by a private entrepreneur who later leased a portion of the property to a company called Unison (a subsidiary of Union Carbide). Unison salvaged drained electrical transformers for metals such as copper and brass. Another portion of the property was leased to the Arizona Metals Company, which operated a closed-system copper extraction process from the tailings piles that were left behind. In 1988, the property was sold to Arimetco, Inc., headquartered in Arizona. The approximately 3,500 acres of property have remained essentially the same throughout the changes of ownership. Most of the facilities associated with Anaconda's operation are still on the site including the open-pit mine, mill buildings, tailings piles, waste fluid ponds and the town of Weed Heights.

During Anaconda's 25-year mining operation, 189,000 tons of tailings were generated, with much of it disposed of in both lined and unlined ponds. The tailings streams, which contained arsenic, mercury, lead, copper, zinc and chromium, have contaminated the shallow groundwater on site. Tailings from the mining and milling operations remain on the mine site.

What Has Been Done to Contain the Waste?

NDEP has been the lead regulatory agency since 1982 and has overseen ARCO's remediation of the groundwater plume. The original remediation system had five pump-back wells that pump out groundwater. This has recently been upgraded to a total of nine wells located along the northern end of the site. The purpose of the pump-back system is to prevent further migration of contamination from the site. In addition, the system prevents shallow groundwater from reaching the Wabuska Drain. The pumped out groundwater is then discharged into three lined evaporation ponds on site. The upcoming sampling should reveal how well the older pump-back system has worked.

Reasons For Water Sampling

In response to concerns from nearby residents including the Yerington Paiute Tribe, the Walker River Paiute Tribe and residents of the Sunset Hills subdivision, both NDEP and EPA decided further investigation of the groundwater was warranted to determine if contaminants had migrated off site. The closeness of communities to the mine has sparked this concern, as a number of private residences are located within one mile of the site, and the Yerington Tribe's reservation lies approximately 2.5 miles downgradient from the site. The Walker River Tribe is concerned that contamination may migrate via the Wabuska Drain to the Walker River.

Community Meeting To Discuss Water Sampling

Wednesday,
October 20, 1999
7:00 pm

Yerington Paiute Tribe
Administration Building
Yerington, Nevada

The Yerington Tribe and other residents recently collected water samples from domestic and tribal wells. At two locations, arsenic was detected at levels higher than drinking water standards (maximum contaminant levels, or MCLs). The sampling that NDEP will conduct is designed to determine, under strict quality control, whether contaminants attributable to the site have impacted domestic or tribal wells. Additionally, the Wabuska Drain will be sampled to determine potential impact to the Walker River.

How the Sampling Will Be Done

The current schedule for NDEP's sampling of water and sediment will be October 25 through November 5, 1999. Under EPA sampling procedures, NDEP will sample groundwater from three types of wells: pump-

back wells, monitoring wells and drinking water wells. The pump-back and monitoring wells are located in ARCO's remediation area immediately north of the tailings and evaporation ponds. Drinking water wells will be sampled in each subdivision where residents are on individual wells and from each tribal/municipal well. For domestic wells, the samples will be collected from the spigot closest to the well. A total of 40-50 wells will be sampled for a wide-range of constituents and all metals including sulfate, iron, arsenic and copper, as well as pH level. For comparison, background groundwater samples will be obtained from residential wells west of the mine's northernmost tailings pond. Results of this sampling effort will be provided to the communities in several months after all validation has occurred.

NDEP is asking for volunteers from the communities who will allow their domestic wells to be sampled. If you would like to offer your well for sampling, please contact Mary Kay Riedl at NDEP (see contact info below). You may also volunteer your well at the community meeting on October 20.

In addition to the upcoming NDEP sampling, ARCO recently took groundwater samples north of their current containment system. When results of this latest sampling by ARCO are in, they should prove helpful in determining if off-site migration of mine contaminants has occurred.

For More Information

If you have questions or concerns regarding the upcoming water sampling for the Anaconda Mine site, please do not hesitate to contact any of the people below:

Mary Kay Riedl
Project Manager, Nevada Division of Environmental Protection
333 W. Nye Lane
Carson City, NV 89706
(775) 687-4670, ext. 3023

Vicki Rosen
Community Involvement Coordinator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
75 Hawthorne St. (SFD-3)
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 744-2187 or (800) 231-3075

Meg Jensen
Assistant Field Manager, Non-Renewable Resources
Bureau of Land Management
5665 Morgan Mill Road
Carson City, NV 89701
(775) 885-6115

Stephen Snyder
Lyon County Manager
31 S. Main St.
Yerington, NV 89447
(775) 463-6531

Misty Wilson
Environmental Coordinator
Yerington Paiute Tribe
171 Campbell Lane
Yerington, NV 89447
(775) 883-6848

Morgan Bradley
Environmental Protection Specialist
Walker River Paiute Tribe
P.O. Box 220
Schurz, NV 89427
(775) 773-2306